



City of Arts & Innovation

Governmental Processes Committee

TO: GOVERNMENTAL PROCESSES COMMITTEE DATE: APRIL 1, 2026

FROM: CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE WARDS: ALL

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF CITY COUNCIL FEEDBACK AND DIRECTION ON THE PROPOSED CITYWIDE WARD-SPECIFIC SPECIAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS, AND PROJECTS POLICY

ISSUES:

Review City Council feedback regarding the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* and provide direction on the election-period safeguards analysis from the City Attorney's Office as requested on January 7, 2026, Governmental Processes Committee meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Governmental Processes Committee:

1. Receive and review City Council feedback provided during consideration of the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy*;
2. Provide direction to staff on potential policy revisions refining election-period provisions related to branding, promotion practices, and the treatment of recurring annual events;
3. Direct staff to revise the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* consistent with Committee direction and return the item to the Governmental Processes Committee or City Council, as appropriate, for further consideration.

BACKGROUND:

On June 27, 2023, the City Council approved the amended Fiscal Year 2023/24 budget, which included funding for Citywide and ward-specific events intended to support community engagement, tourism, and economic development throughout the City. As part of this effort, staff developed the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* to provide a consistent framework for the planning and implementation of ward-based programming.

On August 6, 2025, the Governmental Processes Committee reviewed the draft policy and voted

to recommend City Council approval with minor modifications related to budget clarification and the prohibition of donations to individuals or organizations. Those clarifications were incorporated into the draft policy presented to the City Council.

On October 28, 2025, the City Council considered the proposed policy but did not adopt it. Following discussion, the City Council voted to refer the item back to the Governmental Processes Committee for further review. During City Council consideration, multiple Councilmembers provided feedback and raised policy questions regarding the structure, implementation, and safeguards associated with ward-specific events and funding.

On January 7, 2026, the Governmental Processes Committee reviewed the draft policy and requested additional information regarding the election cycle events. Specifically, the Committee requested the City Attorney's Office to review whether annually occurring events, which happen to fall near an election can still proceed under the policy. Committee members generally expressed that the ward event program has functioned effectively to date and that existing procedures have largely worked as intended. The Committee requested the report return to Committee prior to going to the City Council.

DISCUSSION:

A proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* was developed to provide a consistent framework for the planning and implementation of ward-based events, programs, and projects. The proposed policy outlined eligibility criteria, implementation responsibilities, budget considerations, and election-related safeguards. The proposed policy was presented to the City Council on October 28, 2025, but was not adopted and was instead referred to the Governmental Processes Committee for further discussion. The policy was then presented to the Governmental Processes Committee on January 7, 2026. The Governmental Processes Committee provided feedback on several items and requested City Attorney's Office review specifically on the issue of election cycle protections. The Committee directed the analysis to return to the Governmental Processes Committee for review prior to the policy going to the City Council.

Election Cycles and Branding

During the October 28, 2025, City Council meeting, Councilmembers discussed the proposed policy's election-related provisions, including the 90-day restriction prior to an election cycle, and raised questions regarding how election periods should be defined and applied. Several Councilmembers expressed concern that the current approach could unintentionally limit recurring annual events that have historically served the community, even when those events are not intended to be political in nature.

Staff suggested that this section be modified to prohibit Councilmember participation in the planning of such an event "within 90 days preceding an election in which the Councilmember's name will appear on the ballot at that election," which is similar to the Political Reform Act's ban on mass mailings at public expense (Gov. Code section 1090 et. seq., Regulation Sections 89000 - 89003). The Committee requested whether this section could exempt annually recurring events so that Councilmembers could continue to support these community events. The Committee also discussed that the branding of the event could refer to Ward number only and not a Councilmember by name.

State law generally prohibits local governments, such as the City, from using public funds to advocate in political campaigns and elections. Taking steps to avoid even the appearance of

advocacy on the City's part can avoid this issue. If the Council desires to exempt annually recurring community events from the 90-day election period prohibition, it is recommended that the policy clearly define what constitutes an annually recurring event and avoid event branding that could be viewed as City advocacy in the upcoming election. The draft policy lists annually recurring events which have occurred for at least three years, as exempt from the 90-day election prohibition. At least three years is recommended because that period shows an established community event and clearly defines which events are permissible during the 90-day timeframe. Avoiding branding and promotions with a Councilmember's name and logos and instead using Local Vibes and the Ward number or neighborhood name will also help avoid appearance of advocacy in an upcoming election, as this will establish consistent branding across all events and wards.

Additional discussions addressed operational improvements, including the benefit of conducting an annual pre-event planning meeting between staff and each Council office to identify priorities and reduce last minute requests. Committee members also discussed allowing ward funds to be used for events or projects outside a Councilmember's ward when there is a broader City benefit, provided that such use follows a formal request and approval process.

The Committee also discussed post event accountability and supported requiring a standardized after action or post event report for all ward funded activities. Suggested elements included cost breakdowns, attendance or participation information, and lessons learned, both to support transparency and to inform future planning.

Committee Direction Requested

Based upon the analysis set forth herein, City staff is seeking Governmental Processes Committee direction on the issues outlined above prior to revising the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* and returning the item to the City Council for further consideration.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Funding for ward-specific events, programs, and projects is included in the Fiscal Year 2025/26 Citywide allocation approved by the City Council during the annual budget process. No additional fiscal impact will result from this action.

Prepared by: Ruby Leann Castillo, Principal Management Analyst
Approved by: Mike Futrell, City Manager
Approved as to form: Rebecca McKee-Reimbold, Interim City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Proposed Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy
2. Presentation